Perinatal Mental Health

Risk Factors, Symptoms, and Identification of Postpartum Depression

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Background on Perinatal Depression

- Symptoms
- Risk Factors
- Prevalence
- Timing of Onset
- Screening and Identification
- Resources
Postpartum Depression

- Approximately 10-15% of women will experience postpartum depression.

- An additional 40-50% of low-income women are estimated to have elevated depressive symptoms, which are linked to the same poor maternal and child health outcomes (Ammeman et al., 2009).

- Women who experience PPD are more likely to develop recurrent mood disorders throughout life, as well as impaired attachment and parenting (Meltzer-Brody & Stuebe, 2014).

- PPD is linked to developmental delays among infants, including social interaction difficulties, attachment insecurity, and cognitive impairments (Grace et al., 2003; Sohr-Preston & Scaramella, 2006).
Expectations of Motherhood

- Expectations and fantasies are a natural and healthy way of preparing for motherhood
  - Experiences
  - Cultural background
- In face of discrepancy between what is anticipated and what is experienced can lead to guilt, confusion, unhappiness, anxiety
- Women with PPD, increased quantity and severity of those disappointments
- No woman with PPD has initial stages of motherhood as she’d fantasized
- Consequently, help-seeking for PPD is hindered by the disconnect between how a new mom feels, and how she thinks she is supposed to feel.
A “Perfect Storm”

- Unrealistic expectations
- Hormonal changes
- Sleep Deprivation
- Single biggest identity transition for women
- Possible difficulties in pregnancy or birth
- Possible predisposition for depression or anxiety (prior depression is biggest predictor for postpartum depression)
Common Mood Symptoms

- Feeling sad or “empty”, crying more often
- Feeling numb or disconnected from baby
- Loss of interest in activities, withdrawing from loved ones
- Feeling hopeless, like nothing good ever happens
- Feeling guilty, worthless, like a failure, or like she isn’t being a good mother
- Irritability or anger
- Loss of energy
- Problems concentrating, remembering things, making decisions
- Difficulty falling asleep or sleeping too much
- Overeating or loss of appetite
- Worried about hurting the baby
- Thoughts of suicide or ‘life not worth living’
Postpartum Blues or Baby Blues

This is a more common experience than people think!

• After giving birth, 3 to 8 out of 10 women may have baby blues

• Symptoms usually start within the first week after delivery, and last less than 2 weeks

• Often, women are screened by their OB in their postpartum visit, with symptoms perceived as brief and transient

• Important to re-screen at a later date, in case symptoms have not resolved, have worsened, or have begun later in the postpartum period.
Postpartum Depression

After giving birth, 1-3 women out of 10 may develop postpartum depression

- Women may experience 5 more mood symptoms, lasting more than 2 weeks
- Symptoms may get in the way of doing normal daily activities

- Onset of symptoms
- Recent research shows that the timing and onset of PPD varies widely:
  - 40% of women who experience PPD after delivery
  - 33% of women experience PPD beginning during pregnancy
  - 27% of women who experience PPD were depressed before pregnancy
Risk Factors For Maternal Depression

- Previous history of depression
- Low social support
- Relationship dissatisfaction
- Stressful life events
- Obstetrics complications
- Single parent
- Low-income
- Unplanned pregnancy
How do depressed new mothers FEEL?

- Depressed, sad, mourning
- Anxious, Panicky
- Feelings of unreality, “Numb”
- Resentful
- Irritable or angry
- Regretful, “What have I done?”
- Hopeless
- Lonely
- Feelings of Loss, Missing “old life”
How do depressed new mothers THINK?

- Unrealistic expectations new motherhood
- Unrealistic expectations for baby
- Preoccupation with baby’s safety & vulnerability
- Negative thinking/thought distortions
- Suicidal ideation
- Egodystonic thoughts of harming baby
- Obsessive-compulsive thoughts and behaviors
What do depressed new mothers DO?

- Withdraw from activities that used to give them pleasure
- Diminished or absent bond with baby
- Conflict or strain with partner
- Avoid sex and/or physical affection
- Experience sleep problems
- Increased risk for breastfeeding difficulties
Major Depression is Only Part of the Picture

Number of people affected

Intensity of symptoms

Mild to moderately severe depressive symptoms

Diagnosed depression
Reluctance to disclose emotional problems, particularly depression
- Shame, stigma, fear of being labeled mentally ill, burdensome
- Reluctance to respond to the mothers’ emotional and practical needs
  - by both family members and health professionals’
- Lack of knowledge/awareness about postpartum depression
  - “I thought this was a normal part of motherhood”
- Lack of resources to get assistance
  - Limited mental health resources, no insurance, competing demands on time
- Trying to handle it on their own
  - “Dealing with it”; “keeping the faith”; “trying to be a strong woman”; “keeping it a secret”

Dennis, CL, & Chung-Lee, L, 2006
Delivering mental health intervention in other settings

- Addresses major depression and clinically relevant symptoms
- MB develops the capacity of staff to address stress and depression among their clients
- MB easily integrates with other services and programs as an “overlay” to address mental health concerns
- Clients are more accepting of a mental health intervention from a trusted provider